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Spy Business As Guesswork

The spy business let a secret chapter slip into the open this month, for the possible enlightenment of us all.

On Dec. 8, the CIA estimate of its information was that India was planning to complete the war by dismantling West Pakistan's military apparatus.

On Dec. 9, the estimate of Reporter Henry Bradsher of the Washington Star (on assignment in India) was that India's military commanders wanted to do just that but that Prime Minister Gandhi exercised effective political control over them, "heavily influenced by the Soviets," and followed a plan against expanding the war.

The point is that good reporters and good CIA agents do essentially the same thing. The problem is that decision makers have to use the source they believe is best and, in this instance, the best source was not best. A secondary problem was that the decision makers declined to use their own official listener in India, Ambassador Keating, and they were stuck with an avoidably-bad guess.